

Alaska Division of Public Health

Influenza Fact Sheet

What is influenza?

Influenza is a virus. There are three types of influenza viruses (A, B, and C). Influenza types A and B cause respiratory illnesses.

What are the symptoms and how soon do they occur after exposure to an ill person?

Illness will usually begin very suddenly 1-5 days after exposure and commonly lasts for 2-7 days. Symptoms usually include fever, cough, headache, muscle aches, and fatigue.

When does influenza occur?

Influenza occurs in the late fall and winter in the United States.

Who can get influenza?

Anyone. Persons at highest risk for severe illness are the elderly, the very young, and those with chronic medical problems such as heart or lung conditions, diabetes, or trouble with their immune system.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread from an ill person to other people by coughing and sneezing.

Can you get influenza from domestic pets and animals?

Animals such as pigs, horses, and birds can become ill with their own influenza viruses. Pigs have spread their influenza viruses (known as "swine flu") to people. While it is unusual for humans to get influenza virus infections directly from poultry or birds, rare human infections and outbreaks caused by certain avian (bird) influenza A viruses have been documented since 1997.

Is there a treatment for influenza?

Persons with influenza should rest and drink lots of fluids. Treatment is available for influenza A and B. For treatment to be effective, it needs to be given within 48 hours of beginning influenza symptoms. This is not a replacement for the influenza vaccine.

Can you get influenza more than once?

Yes. More than one type of influenza can go around each winter so people can get the flu more than once a year. People will usually get influenza many times in their life.

Is there a vaccine for influenza?

Yes. Different strains of influenza circulate at different times. A new vaccine is issued each flu season. People who need the vaccine should get vaccinated every year. People who are at risk for getting a serious case of influenza or a complication should get the vaccine. This also includes anyone who has close contact with people who are at risk for getting a serious case of influenza and anyone who wishes to avoid getting the flu.

How can you prevent the spread of influenza?

Persons who are ill with fever and cough should stay home. They should not go to school or work. They could easily spread the disease to other people. People should cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and should frequently wash their hands. A safe and effective vaccine is available, especially for persons at high risk (listed above) or anyone wishing to avoid influenza. Because the virus may change slightly from year to year the vaccine is changed each year and should be received each influenza season.

What if I have additional questions about influenza?

Contact your health care provider or your local public health center. You can also visit the following websites for additional information: <http://www.cdc.gov> or <http://www.epi.alaska.gov>